

## Where Do You Want to Work?

### Choosing Your Best School Type

**A**s a faculty member, the differences between types of colleges and universities at which you might work will influence which of your abilities are valued and how you are evaluated for tenure and promotions; what is expected of you professionally; the research, teaching, travel and other opportunities available to you; and the colleagues you'll work with: in general, what your faculty experience will be like. You need to know what type of institution is likely to offer the environment and opportunities that fit your personal and professional goals.

#### How Schools Differ and Affect Faculty

The size of a school's student body can range from dozens to more than 100,000. This will make the biggest difference in the size of your classes and how much you can interact with your students. Selectivity varies from highly competitive to open admissions. Selectivity will determine the type of students with whom you work. As a researcher, you will benefit from academically advanced students who can assist with research projects. As a teacher, you may prefer either more advanced students or remedial students, with whom you can "make a bigger difference." Either way, it will affect the way you design and teach your courses to meet student needs. Some schools have very ethnically, geo-graphically and socio-economically diverse student populations. Others are single-gender, historically black, largely Hispanic-serving or largely white. As a faculty member, you may have a desire to serve a specific population or a preference for either a very diverse or more homogeneous environment.

Academic institutions have a wide variety of missions; their focuses can range from vocational instruction to liberal arts to research. This will influence the type of classes you'll teach. Most importantly, it will determine how your professional performance will be evaluated; for example: is it good teaching, prolific publication or securing research grants that will get you promotion and tenure?

Another issue is the religious versus secular values of an institution. Within the set of schools that have religious affiliations, there is a broad range between those that are nominally affiliated with a church – e.g., Emory or Boston University – but operate largely as secular institutions, to the overtly religious, where students may be required to attend chapel services, and a religious perspective is integrated into all courses. You may be attracted to a school with strong

religious values. On the other hand, an institution's religious affiliation may limit your research topics.

Institutions may be public, private or for-profit. For-profits, such as DeVry University or University of Phoenix, employ very few full-time faculty. More selective, larger private schools are very similar to public institutions. Private research universities generally pay higher salaries than public research universities. But smaller, less selective private schools usually pay significantly less than public schools. Some private schools spend upwards of \$50,000 per student, while many state universities spend around \$15,000 per student. Selective private schools spend the most; public and small private schools spend the least. This affects the type of student with whom you will be working, because it affects tuition rates. It also determines student-faculty ratios (translation: larger classes and class loads for you at schools that spend less), your salary, opportunities for professional development, your travel budget and campus facilities.

#### Types of Schools and What to Expect

Research universities, which number about 100 in the U.S., including the University of Georgia, produce a large number of doctorates in a broad range of academic fields. The title "research university" is not a quality indicator: there are elite and not-so-elite research universities. At a research university, you will teach, but research is job No. 1.

Doctoral and comprehensive universities bring in less money for research and offer fewer doctorate programs. Georgia State and Georgia Southern are examples, along with any school with a directional adjective in its name. You will probably still produce some research, but these can be fulfilling work places for people interested in teaching. However, doctoral and comprehensive universities are the ones most likely to have aspirations for growing, improving or increasing their prestige, making it more difficult to determine what is expected of you.

Baccalaureate colleges offer only bachelor's degrees. They include colleges with career-oriented programs, such as journalism or business, as well as true liberal arts colleges that do not have professional, applied majors. Students may choose these schools because they are looking for "something different," a smaller or more homogeneous

environment, or because they are less career-oriented in their educational goals. Teaching ability is highly valued. Each baccalaureate college may have its own strong, unique culture, and you must be able to “fit” into it. Except at elite, private baccalaureate colleges, salaries are lower than those of research and comprehensive universities.

### **Finding Your Perfect Fit: What Do You Want? What Do They Offer?**

How do you determine which faculty experience is for you? Despite what your advisor may say, don't fall into the trap of thinking elite, research universities are the only places to work. Faculty members at other institutions are good teachers, make good salaries and have high job satisfaction and quality of life. Ask yourself two questions: What do I want to do? What am I good at? Then, target schools that are likely to reward your strengths and interests with promotions and tenure.

**Sizing Up the School:** Start by looking at how an institution markets itself: look at its view books and Web sites; read its mission statement and analyze the language. Determine how the institution sees itself: is it comfortable with its size, academic quality, research grants and prestige or does it want to move in a new direction? At an institution that is trying to move in a new direction, the professional expectations of you may change, so you need to be adaptable and able to deal with academic politics. On the other hand, it can be energizing to be part of a dynamic organization.

Be wary, though, if the institution's goals are not in line with its resources (for example, it wants to increase the student body, but doesn't have the funds to build more facilities; or the department head wants you to produce more research

but won't cut your teaching load.) Try to determine whether relationships between faculty members have remained good, or whether the politics of change have created an acrimonious environment. Ask whether people hired as assistant professors usually get tenure. If not, this might be a school lacking good mentoring and the desire to see its employees succeed.

### **Non-Tenure-Track Positions: To Take or Not to Take?**

The proportion of faculty members teaching in part-time or three-year, non-tenure-track appointments is rising at all universities. Such a position may not be a long-term benefit to your career if your ultimate goal is to work at a research university. Your teaching load will likely be high, and you will have little time for research and publishing. At the end of three years, you will have the same level of research and publishing credits as a new Ph.D., but you've been out of school for three years. On the other hand, if you think you can handle the teaching load and still be productive, such a position may be a useful stepping-stone.

**Making the Job You Want:** Finally, understand that, to some extent, you can mold a position into the job that you want it to be. Get a solid, tenure-track position, do whatever is expected of you until you get tenure, and then take some liberties. For example, you might focus on research early in your career, establish your credibility, and, later, slow down on research and focus on your teaching. ■

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*Based on the Graduate School seminar “Institutional Diversity: A Typology of Universities and Colleges for Aspiring Faculty” by Christopher Morphew, Institute of Higher Education. To view this seminar in its entirety, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.*